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THE PRESS

Return of the Post

In these pages you will find informative articles and delightful fiction. You'll find fun. You'll find sentiment. In short, you will rediscover an old, old friend.

—Saturday Evening Post editorial

Old is not really the operative word for the new *Saturday Evening Post*, which is back on the nation's newsstands this week as a \$1-a-copy quarterly. Antique is more accurate, right down to the custom re-created headline type used by the *Post* in the 1930s and '40s. In format and much of its content, this is the homey, comfortable, non-controversial old *Post* of Ben Hibbs, not the later, slicker version which piled up some \$500 million in libel suits as a result of its "sophisticated muckraking" and finally perished in 1969 from a combination of advertising atrophy and high-circulation pressure.

People pushing 50 will find the new *Post* almost frighteningly familiar. Artist Norman Rockwell didn't do the cover (even though he is still active at 77), but he is on it, puffing his pipe and preparing to paint a *Post* delivery boy. Inside, there is an eight-page salute to Rockwell, together with a slew of the original *Post*'s old-fashioned, gray "narrative illustrations," which made it seem as if every scene were taking place in an incipient thunderstorm. Other old stand-bys abound. There are reprints of Tugboat Annie and Thomas Wolfe. The bylines of Paul Gallico and Ellery Queen are back, and so is that veteran Hollywood doorbell ringer, Pete Martin, with "I Call on Ali McGraw." William

Hazlett Upson celebrates *The Return of Alexander Botts* and his continuing correspondence with the brass at the Earthworm Tractor Company. The bust of *Post* Patriarch Benjamin Franklin is, of course, prominently displayed.

Cut-Rate Control. This staggering overdose of nostalgia does not bother Beurt SerVaas, 52, the editor and publisher whose name is the most unfamiliar thing about the new *Post*. A blunt, bouncy Indianapolis industrialist who has made a specialty of saving failing companies (and making millions in the process), SerVaas manages a mish-mash mini-empire that includes three steel-forging plants, a chemical company, an employment agency, a business college, another small publishing operation—and now the venerable Curtis Publishing Co. (*Post*, *Holiday*, *Jack and Jill*). SerVaas picked up control of the company at cut-rate prices last year from the estate of Cyrus Curtis, reportedly paying less than \$200,000 for 17% of the shares. With the *Post* dead and *Holiday* dying, Curtis was hardly a hot property. The company was burdened with \$20 million in tax claims and another \$20 million in back debts. Still, SerVaas saw survival possibilities.

Although his background in publishing is exceedingly modest, SerVaas believes that "all businesses are alike. Only the product or service varies," he says. "Most businesses do not fail; managers do. Business failures are management failures." His consistent formula for success is to fire the old management, slash the staff and pinch pennies. Once he became president of Curtis in May 1970, SerVaas went to work on *Holiday*. He shrank it to newsmagazine size, cut its frequency from twelve to nine issues a year, booted out Editor Caskie Stinnett, slashed the staff by two-thirds and started promoting tours. Beurt's wife Cory became executive editor of both *Holiday* and the *Post*. Transformed into a middle-class book geared to mass travel, *Holiday* has suffered in quality, but not on the balance sheet. Thanks to a 60% cut in costs, the magazine turned a tiny (\$21,600) profit in the first four months of this year—the first in a decade.

Only on Newsstands. In reviving the *Post*, SerVaas opted for reminiscence over relevance on the grounds that familiarity was the magazine's prime asset. "We figure there are about 50 million people out there who have read the *Post* at one time or another and remember it," he explains. "I think that's a good base." The current quarterly *Post* has a modest press run of 550,000 and will be sold only on newsstands; the new postal-rate increases, in SerVaas' view, make subscriptions too expensive to service. Advertising for the

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST



COVER OF THE REVIVED MAGAZINE

Reminiscence over relevance.

shoestring, in typical SerVaas fashion. A compact staff of 50, based in Indianapolis, will produce both the *Post* and *Holiday*, and reruns or rewrites by retreads will figure prominently in future issues of the *Post*. But SerVaas seems more interested in profit than prizes. "Except for some minor attorneys' fees and several small creditors' bills," he says proudly, "we have paid off all our creditors, settled all our tax liability, sold off obsolete properties, and are now a small, healthy, operating company." Even including start-up costs for the *Post*, Curtis was in the black for the first four months of 1971. SerVaas may have saved a grand old name in American journalism, but so far it seems a survival without much substance.



CORY & BEURT SERVAAS
Profits over prizes.

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The new Curtis operation runs on a